

i left a taste in your mouth (can you taste me now)

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by [saltbright](#)

Summary

Arthur has never been able to do this quietly.

Holding his breath—chasing the barest hint of friction while he struggles not to alert the *fucking* voice in his *fucking* head—it's a new agony, and one seemingly without end.

(In which John has, accidentally or on purpose, been edging Arthur all night.)

Notes

I can't post this without a HUGE thank you to horseboneologist for being an incredible beta reader and the funniest person alive, as well as to everyone in the group chat for humoring me while I flailed my arms about this fic for weeks. <3 Thanks for giving me the courage to post this irredeemable filth! I have no excuse.

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Arthur is trying not to breathe.

He moves cautiously, hips flexing down against the mattress, and then presses his burning face into the pillow as he struggles to swallow a moan. He's never been able to do this quietly. The muffled sound that escapes is soft but unmistakable, and all of Arthur's muscles tense as he goes still, heart pounding. The seconds tick by, slow as molasses, while he listens for any indication that he's been discovered.

In some ways, it's worse than hiding from monsters.

His cock is a sweetly throbbing ache crushed between his stomach and the bed. Before this, he'd lain awake half-hard for hours, trying to ignore the simmering need that sang through his veins until he couldn't anymore. Holding his breath—chasing the barest hint of friction while he struggles not to alert the *fucking* voice in his *fucking* head—it's a new agony, and one seemingly without end. Arthur could sob with how much he just wants to come.

He's never needed it this badly, never spent so long aching for release that his untouched cock became slick with wanting. He doesn't want to make an event of it; all he wants is to finish so he can sleep. All it would take is a few pulls of his fist, quick and efficient. Relief would be so fast, so easy, if he could just *use his hands*.

His right arm lies at his side, two fingers splinted and immobile at the end of a brace that runs the length of his forearm. His left hand—John's hand—is tucked under the pillow. Both are functionally useless. An uncomfortable swirl of guilt follows that thought. Perhaps he's being unfair. After all, John *had* offered to shave his face earlier, and Arthur had let him. He'd even done a fair job of it.

Unbidden, Arthur is struck with a vision of asking for John's help with *this*. Would he follow Arthur's instructions carefully, eager to please, as he had with the straight razor?

Or perhaps he'd be cruel about it, brutish in that way he gets sometimes. Would he take Arthur roughly in hand, ignorant (or perhaps indifferent) to the hypersensitivity of his flesh? Would he snarl Arthur's name as he wrung pleasure out of him?

Jesus *Christ*. Arthur's cock pulses and he quickly stamps out that line of thought, hot shame twisting low in his belly. *Where did that come from?*

Arthur takes a deep breath, trying to calm his racing heart. That isn't—whatever that was, it doesn't bear thinking about. He's just desperate, that's all. His cock has been filling at the slightest provocation all evening (the gentle scrape of the straight razor over his cheeks and throat; the lingering touch of his left hand on his scarred abdomen when John had undressed them before bed). Arthur shifts uncomfortably, even as he wants to lean into the lick of electricity that thrills through his groin. It's just a mindless organ, he reminds himself. Just a bodily function with no rhyme or reason to it. It doesn't mean anything. Hell, he'd probably stiffen under a strong breeze if it was blowing in the right direction.

In any case, there's been nothing to indicate that John heard him moan a few minutes ago. The only sound in Arthur's head is the rush of blood and his own racing thoughts, and he's keen to shut them up.

Arthur grinds down into the mattress again, exhaling quiet as a whisper. He rolls his hips, harder this time, and bites back a moan when the loose sheet beneath him bunches slightly, catching on the head of his cock in a way that sends a jolt of electricity down his spine. He does it again, gasping as the friction lights up his whole body. Fuck, that's—*good*. The sensation is electric, and he's already so close—if he can just stay quiet a little bit longer, he can—god, he's almost there—*almost*—

There's a loud clank from the radiator, and he freezes.

"Arthur?"

He buries his face in the pillow, heart pounding, and thinks very sincerely about smashing the radiator with a baseball bat. Except, oh wait, *he'd need his fucking hands for that, too*.

"Arthur, I know you're awake. I heard—something."

"Yes, John, I'm awake. It was nothing. Just the radiator."

"You seem agitated," John purrs, gentle warmth trickling into his voice the way it does when he wants something, soft as a caress. "You should get some sleep."

"Believe me, I'd *very* much like to. I've just been—tossing and turning, a bit."

"You should try sleeping on your back."

Arthur nearly laughs at that. "*No*. No, ah, I'm more comfortable on my stomach."

"I'd prefer you on your back, Arthur. It's... safer. I would have a better view of the room."

"No. No, it's fine. We're not in any danger here. Just—try to get some sleep."

"Arthur..."

"Goodnight, John."

"Goodnight."

Ten excruciating minutes pass before Arthur allows himself to move again. His erection, which had flagged slightly in the interim, stiffens again with the first tentative shift of his hips. He rocks cautiously against the mattress, building a shallow rhythm that he hopes is subtle enough to continue to escape John's notice. His cock leaks through the opening of his pants, soaking the thin fabric with precome, and that's—different, he's never gotten so slick before, but he's also never been wrenched back from the edge so many times. He grimaces as his cock drags through the cooling wet patch, and the dull pressure building in his groin isn't exactly *good* this time, but he can tell it's *enough*. He hears himself breathing harshly as he

speeds up, pushing toward a utilitarian release, and *oh, fuck*—he gasps into the pillow—finally, *finally*, just a little more—

“Still trying to *sleep*, Arthur?”

Are you fucking kidding. His hips stutter to a halt and the relief that had been so close moments ago evaporates, replaced by a simmering rage.

“What the *fuck* is the point if you’re just going to wake me every time I start to nod off?”

John lets out a long, low laugh that seems to curl around the back of Arthur’s neck, heavy as a hand. Arthur’s erection twitches, nearly to the point of pain. “I could say the same thing to you.”

Arthur’s frustration seeps out in a deep sigh. “What do you need, John?”

“I think the more pressing question is what do *you* need, Arthur?”

Arthur’s stomach flips over, but he grits his teeth and answers. “Stop playing games. If you have something to say, then *say it*.”

John growls, and the sound is so close Arthur imagines he can feel his lips behind his ear. “Do you think I’m stupid, Arthur? Do you think I can’t hear your pathetic little noises?”

Arthur’s blood runs cold, then hot.

“*Stop it*. I’m not—we’re not having this conversation.”

“It’s a little late for that, Arthur. Did you think you were being subtle?”

“Go to *sleep*, John. *Please*.”

“How did you put it? Oh, right: what the fuck is the point, with you moaning loud enough to wake the dead?”

Arthur gasps, indignant. “I—I wasn’t—”

“You were, Arthur. Listen to you, playing innocent as if you haven’t been writhing like a whore all night.”

“Shut up! I don’t—”

“I don’t sleep, Arthur. Did you forget that? Or maybe you wanted me to hear you. Is that it? Does it turn you on that I’ve heard you every time you stroked your cock in the middle of the night, all these weeks, trying and failing to fuck yourself quietly—”

“That’s not true! I *never*—this isn’t something I’ve—*made a habit of* since you showed up, and you should bloody well know that! I don’t know *why* my blood is up tonight, but I didn’t want—I just needed—”

“That’s right, you *needed*—”

Arthur slams his injured arm on the bed, bellowing in pain and outrage. “Shut the fuck up and let me speak!”

“Jesus, Arthur, calm d—”

“Don’t tell me to calm down. I am trying to explain—”

“Arthur—”

“It’s a bodily function, damn it; base, perhaps, but perfectly natural—”

“Arthur, I know! It’s alright. I know.”

“Then why the fuck am I explaining myself to you? I don’t owe you that. I don’t owe you shit! If anything, you owe *me*, you bastard.”

“Please, Arthur, tell me what you think I *owe* you.”

“Privacy, for a start! At the very least!”

John laughs at that, long and loud. “We share a body, Arthur. We don’t get privacy.”

“*You* share *my* body! You would do well to remember that. And at present, you have possession of my only functional hand, while I’m reduced to—to rutting against a goddamn mattress!”

Arthur’s harsh breathing is the only sound he hears. Humiliation and anger tangle in his gut as he catches his breath. He has the helpless urge to close his eyes, as if that could blot out the voice inside him. It’s a futile reflex; a useless, instinctual longing for a false semblance of safety. He feels exposed and flayed raw and—and even after all that, he’s *still hard*, god damn him. He lets out a hollow, brittle laugh.

“Do you feel better?” John asks.

Arthur shakes his head. “No. Not even a little bit.” A tear escapes the corner of his eye. He can feel it trailing down the side of his nose.

He plants his face back into the pillow as bone-deep weariness settles over him. He wants to sleep for a year. His cock throbs miserably, still pressed between his belly and the bunched up sheets.

“Arthur... would you like me to help? I could... lend a hand, so to speak.”

“What?”

“*Help*, Arthur. It’s when someone—”

“Yes, thank you, I fucking know what help is! Jesus Christ, John. I don’t—I don’t think I understand what you’re offering.”

“I think you understand just fine.”

“Well, maybe *you don’t*. What you’re suggesting, it’s not—it isn’t decent.”

John chuckles. The deep rumble of it travels down Arthur’s spine. “Oh, well, if it’s not *decent*.”

The arrogance in his tone makes Arthur’s blood boil, even as it wraps around him like dark water, threatening to drag him under.

“Don’t laugh at me, John. I’m not in the mood.”

“I’m not laughing at you.” John sighs. When he speaks again, his voice is gentle. “Arthur, you need help. Let me help you.”

The offer is humiliating (worse still is the fact that he considers it), but there’s something in John’s manner that rubs on Arthur’s mind like a splinter, so small and fine he almost misses it. A tiny, crystalline fragment of—not contrition, but perhaps sincerity. John’s an asshole, but Arthur understands, with a flash of clarity, that he’s not actually trying to humiliate him. Paltry though it is, he’s annoyed to find it does take the sting out. (He wonders, not for the first time, if there’s anything John could do that he wouldn’t forgive.)

“I—I can’t.”

“Before...” John hesitates, seeming unsure whether he should proceed. “You said it’s perfectly natural. So, why not—”

“Fuck you, John.” Arthur’s voice is muffled by the pillow, and there’s no real venom left in it, anyway. “I said I *can’t*. Leave it alone.”

“Right.” John sounds nearly chastised. “I don’t *understand*, but... alright. It was just a suggestion. I can’t give you true privacy, but I can try to provide the... illusion of it, so you can tend to your needs. We don’t have to talk about it.”

Arthur exhales shakily. “Thank you.”

“Yes, well. Unlike you, I can actually be quiet.”

“*Please*, John.”

“Alright, alright. Goodnight, Arthur.”

Silence falls suddenly. It stretches across the room, a hollow, fluorescent ringing that makes the space feel emptier than it is. A more optimistic man than Arthur might believe he was really alone. ‘The illusion of privacy,’ indeed. Irritatingly, he feels a flash of gratitude toward John.

He takes a few moments to gather his nerve, and then, after sucking in a shaky breath, he gives a tentative push against the mattress.

Silence. There's no interruption. No need to hold back.

He thrusts harder this time. He's tired, sore, and embarrassed, but his need is still there, urging him forward as he chases relief. He slams his hips forward and the bed frame knocks against the wall, shockingly loud. He does it again.

No one in the room could pretend not to know what's happening. Something sweeter than shame unfurls in his stomach at the thought, and Arthur gasps, sweat rolling down his back as he rocks down into the mattress. John had said he'd stay quiet. He hadn't said anything about listening, or... or watching.

Arthur groans, no longer trying to muffle the sounds that pour out of him. The thought stokes a fire that he's been trying and failing to put out, and in that moment he wants to stop fighting it. (John would tell him to stop fighting it. Would probably call him an idiot, and growl his name like profanity—)

Arthur moans again, and he needs—he *wants*—

“Damn it,” he whispers, as his carefully constructed reasons fall away. “God *damn* it, John.”

He shifts onto his right side, his left knee sliding up beside him. The new angle gives him more control, and he fucks down into the mattress in earnest. It's the kind of position that would let him drive his cock deeper into a partner, that would let him watch as he did so, and he—

he—

looks

down.

“Are you listening, John?” The urge to hide is back, but the desire to be seen is stronger. “Are you looking at me? *Yes*. Okay? I'm saying yes.”

“You continue to surprise me, Arthur.” The smug satisfaction in John's voice sets Arthur's teeth on edge, even as it makes something dark swoop in his gut.

And then he's being touched.

Arthur knows that physically, it's his arm, but there's nothing of himself in the way John uses it. Arthur would have taken himself in hand immediately, but John starts out simply stroking their—*Arthur's*—side, first with his palm (firm and steady, like he's soothing an animal), and then with the back of his hand. He draws his smooth nail beds along their flank, trailing goosebumps that spread in shivers across his entire body until Arthur's skin is alight with sensation, his muscles loose as melted butter. Then he slips his hand underneath them to palm at the soft crush of Arthur's belly. Arthur shifts, spreading his legs and arching his back slightly to give him room.

“Lift up for me, Arthur,” John murmurs.

Arthur takes a moment to breathe, and then he shifts his weight to his shoulders and folds forward, knees tucked under, raising his arse to create a slim gap between his belly and thighs for John’s hand to move through. John hums appreciatively and Arthur’s cheeks flare hot enough to burn a hole through the pillow.

John still doesn’t touch his cock, but Arthur finds he doesn’t mind. The sensations are new and unhurried. John’s long, leisurely touches seem to draw him out of his body and then press him back into it, leaving him both grounded and afloat, and more relaxed than he’s been in—God only knows how long.

His breath catches when John’s hand slides lower, dipping beneath the band of his pants, only to skirt around Arthur’s erection to trail over the tops of his thighs instead. Arthur’s cock twitches even as John ignores it, and somehow that’s good, too. John slows to rub his palm over the crisp, curly blond hairs that blanket Arthur’s thighs, and then spends several minutes scratching short, blunt fingernails through Arthur’s pubic hair after doing so drags a broken moan out of him. His knuckles occasionally graze Arthur’s genitals, but he seems content to luxuriate in the textures of Arthur’s skin, as though his only desire is to map his body and catalog his reactions. The thought makes Arthur squirm, suddenly desperate for more than John’s giving him.

“Please,” he whispers. It comes out as a muddy sort of whimper, nearly unintelligible.

John seems to understand. He withdraws his hand slowly, petting as he goes, and then braces his forearm on the mattress, lifting them partially up. He waits for Arthur to rearrange his injured arm, and then, working together, they roll onto their back.

John untangles the sheets from around their body. He tugs at the band of Arthur’s pants, coaxing him to lift up so he can slide them down. Arthur lifts his legs as John tugs, and the thin cotton slips free. John balls up the pants and tosses them into the corner near their bag.

A noise of complaint catches in Arthur’s throat. “We needed those.”

“Why?”

Arthur fights the urge to look at the ceiling. “To—clean up. Afterward.”

John hums, low and satisfied. “Maybe I want you messy.”

“*Jesus*, John. That’s...”

“Indecent?”

“Yes!”

“Good. Look down, Arthur,” he murmurs. “Let me see you.”

God help him, but Arthur obeys.

For a moment, neither of them move. Arthur can feel his cock bobbing in the cool air, John's gaze pressing on his skin like a physical touch.

"Do you know what you look like?" John whispers. His voice sounds punched out, reverent.

"No." Arthur's face burns, picturing how foolish he must appear. "But I—I can imagine."

"You look wrecked, Arthur. Miserable and rapturous at once." John's fingers trail over their stomach. He spreads them out and digs in softly, kneading the tender flesh. "Your chest heaves with every breath, and your cock is flushed red as a wound. It pulses obscenely when I say something that shocks you—*yes, just like that*—and clear fluid dribbles from the slit. Oh, Arthur... I don't think you're concerned with decency at all."

Arthur lets out a whimpering moan, his hips pushing against thin air.

"Please, John—"

"Tell me what you want, Arthur."

"Fuck—why?" Arthur nearly sobs. "You already *know* what I want."

Fingers push against Arthur's mouth, and he gasps, unable to stop his tongue from darting out to taste them.

"I want to hear you say it."

Arthur's whisper is nearly inaudible. "*Touch me.*"

"Good boy."

John ghosts the pad of his thumb over Arthur's slit, relishing the little gasp it earns him. He moves on to trace the thick rim of his foreskin, which has retracted just far enough to show the slightly tapered tip of his cock. John toys with the sensitive skin, rolling its impossible softness between his fingertips, before gliding it gently down to reveal the full red head. Arthur whimpers, oversensitized, and a well of glossy precome spills from the tip. John smears his fingers through it hungrily.

"Oh, Arthur," he growls, soft as breath. "You're so wet for me."

Arthur moans—in distress or agreement, or perhaps some marriage between the two.

John wraps his loose fist around Arthur's cock and gives it one long, slow stroke. Arthur cries out, his hips lifting off the bed.

"Shall I describe it for you? Tell you all the pretty ways you wear your desperation? Say the things you won't let yourself say?"

Arthur turns his red face into the pillow, heat scorching through him. "Alright."

"Lift your head, Arthur," John chides.

“Sorry—”

John shushes him. “Your cock is dripping, Arthur, slicking my fingers—*our* fingers—with strings of clear fluid. God, you’re a mess.”

Arthur squirms under the intense scrutiny. He can feel his face and chest burning with a complicated blend of humiliation and arousal.

“Anyone entering the room right now would see a man alone in his bed, fucking desperately into his own hand. There’s a thin sheen of sweat on our skin. It catches the moonlight from the gaps in the curtain, casting our body in silver. You wear shame like a fine garment, Arthur, but I think pleasure suits you better.”

Arthur makes a sharp, bitten-off noise; he thinks John echoes it.

John’s voice grows rougher as he continues. “Your cock is throbbing. I can feel it pulsing in my hand, growing slicker with every stroke. Christ, Arthur, are you always this wet when you’re aroused?”

“I—*ah*—no, never. I think it’s because—*mm!*—it’s never taken me this long to come.”

“I like it,” John rumbles, his voice soft and close. “I like you filthy, Arthur. What shall we do with you next?”

“Fuck,” Arthur breathes through the lump in his throat, unable to rise above a whisper. “What—whatever you want, just don’t stop, please don’t...” he breaks off with a moan as John twists his hand.

Arthur knows that physically, it’s the same hand with which he’s stroked himself off countless times in the decades that have passed him by since puberty. But he can’t deny that whatever this is, it’s not masturbation. It may be his body, but it’s John gliding a firm hand down his shaft, John rolling his testicles around in his palm, John tugging sweetly at his foreskin, John, *John*...

Arthur becomes aware, distantly, that he’s whispering John’s name like a litany.

“I’ve got you, Arthur,” John whispers back, and it’s—it’s overwhelming, unfathomable, and possibly unwise how much Arthur trusts him. He relaxes into John’s touch.

On his own, Arthur would keep this sort of thing quick and tidy, but it’s becoming clear that John means to take his time, already spreading his slick around, getting him *messy*, just like he had said.

John varies his pace, bringing him almost to the brink and then walking it back, soothing Arthur’s frustration with agonizing touches to his most sensitive places. He gives Arthur’s cock a leisurely squeeze, then allows his hand to wander, stroking Arthur’s testicles, ghosting over his thighs and belly, and dragging slow, light scratches over the sensitive skin on his arms, chest, scalp. Arthur heaves a shaking breath, tears rolling down his cheeks as he presses into every touch.

“How do you feel?” John’s voice is the only thing he hears.

“So good,” Arthur groans. “You feel so fucking good, John.” Why had he been ashamed to admit that before? He feels hazy, blissed out, made honest by pleasure.

John seems to hesitate. When he speaks again, his voice has a hoarse, breathless quality Arthur’s never heard before.

“Tell me why it feels good, Arthur. *Why* do you like it?”

“You *know* why.”

“I want to hear you say it. Tell me why you like this. Can you do that for me?”

Arthur doesn’t reply, butting his head into John’s scratching fingers with a sigh.

“Why don’t I take a guess?” John trails his hand back down to Arthur’s cock and circles it loosely—not quite stroking, just tracing idly along the veins. His touch is maddeningly soft, and Arthur jerks forward in his grasp. John pushes his hips down, gently chiding, and Arthur lets out a miserable whine.

“I think you like giving up control,” John murmurs, cupping Arthur’s cock again. “I think it feels good for you to put yourself in someone else’s hands, someone else’s responsibility. Am I close?”

“No,” Arthur gasps, writhing up into John’s hand.

John laughs. “No? I don’t believe you.”

“It’s just because—because you’re touching me. Because—*oh, fuck*—because I need it, I need...”

“Ah,” John rumbles, and Arthur flushes beneath the knowing smile he can hear in his voice. “Purely physical. Nothing else to it. No other explanation for why you’re falling apart beneath my hands.”

He does something delicious with his wrist, as if to demonstrate. Arthur surges forward with a choked gasp, his cock stiffening impossibly further. “Oh god—John—”

“Yes, Arthur?” John purrs.

Arthur doesn’t answer. Harsh breaths rise out of him as he fucks into John’s hand. His legs tense and a tremble runs through him, sweat breaking out across his chest—

John’s hand stills abruptly, his grip tightening at the base of his cock.

“Not yet, Arthur. I’m not done with you.”

He holds Arthur’s orgasm at bay until the crashing wave retreats, while Arthur moans in frustration. John lifts his hand to pet his chest instead, rubbing soothing circles through his

sparse chest hair while Arthur shudders and twitches beneath his touch, hot tears rolling down their cheeks. John chuckles.

“Don’t laugh at me, John.” The audible pout in his voice makes John want to *bite* him. “You said you would help.”

“And so I will,” John murmurs, still petting his chest. “Be good for me, Arthur.”

He pinches one nipple, *hard*, earning him a sharp cry, and then the other. A rumble of satisfaction rolls through him when Arthur shudders and leans into it. He trails his hand back down to Arthur’s cock while Arthur’s muscles tremble with the effort of trying to lie still, to *be good*, whatever that means to him. Arthur goes pliant and sweet under his light touches, and the grateful sigh he lets out when John once more takes him in hand makes something stutter where John’s heart might be, if he had one.

When John speaks again, his voice is rough. “I wasn’t laughing at you before, Arthur. I’m in awe of you. I’m *proud* of you. You’re doing so well.”

A sharp intake of breath. “John...”

“You don’t have to tell me,” John reminds him, drawing a whispering touch over the sensitive band of skin just below his crown. “You’re in control.”

“I’m not—” Arthur gasps, straining into John’s hand. “Fuck—it’s because it’s *you*, John. Because I—oh, *fuck*—I *like* that it’s you touching me, you w-watching me—it’s embarrassing and—and *obscene*, and I shouldn’t, Christ, I *shouldn’t*, but I fucking love—oh, god!” he breaks off with a groan as John finally, *finally* begins stroking him in earnest.

“Are you close, Arthur?”

“I’ve been close for hours,” he moans, shamelessly rutting into John’s hand. “I just want to come, *please let me come*—”

“No more teasing,” John promises, stroking him firmly. His voice is hushed and awestruck. The words come out mumbled and run-together, trancelike, as if he’s only half-aware of what he’s saying. “Take what you need. It’s yours, Arthur, I’m yours, anything you want—anything—”

Arthur’s muscles shake and his jaw has gone slack, but he’s still holding his head up so John can see. “Tell me—tell me—”

He doesn’t finish his sentence, but John understands.

“You’re trembling, Arthur. I can see every muscle tensing as you roll your hips forward to meet me. Your movements are fluid and graceful even in your desperation, and *oh*, I can *feel* your desperation, Arthur. I can hear it in your little whimpers and gasps, in the way you moan my name—did you know you were moaning my name?—I like the way your mouth twists it into something filthy, almost as filthy as *you* are, letting me touch you like this—”

“Oh, *god*—John!”

“Fuck, you’re beautiful like this, Arthur. I wish I could see your face when you come for me —”

Arthur moans like the sound is being ripped out of him. He flings his injured arm out to the side, scrabbling uselessly at the sheets through layers of gauze. His back arches, toes flexing as his mind whites out, eclipsed by pleasure. Sweat breaks out across his chest as his orgasm roars through him, cresting and radiating throughout his limbs past the point when it should have stopped. He thinks he hears himself shout, followed by John’s answering growl as he catches Arthur’s spend in his hand.

He falls back against the pillow, panting, as little tremors of pleasure continue to twitch through him. They lay together in silence for a long moment. Arthur sucks in a deep, slow breath. His pulse throbs, bright and alive in his throat, chest, groin. He wonders idly if John can see its flutter beneath their skin.

“Arthur... Are you...”

“Shh,” Arthur mumbles. “Not yet. Just—lie with me.”

There’s a tremulous quality to the hush that settles over them that Arthur can’t quite name. His mind feels slow and easy, and his skin still buzzes with warmth. There’s a pleasant heaviness in his limbs, and a sweet, lingering ache in his balls. He feels impossibly tender, in a way he’d all but forgotten. It feels like something has opened up inside him, a craving older than hunger and deeper than bone. His body wants to curl around another body, to press skin to overheated skin, tangle limbs together and just—breathe him in. (Not just another body—John. *Oh.*) It dawns on Arthur with slow, post-orgasmic clarity (the kind of easy acceptance that anxiety will undoubtedly soon gnaw holes through) that this feeling is much more than he asked for when he called John’s name.

Or maybe... maybe it’s not.

“Arthur?”

“Did you mean it?” he asks, before he can talk himself out of it.

John hesitates. “What, specifically?”

“You called me beautiful.”

“Arthur... everything I said...”

Shit. Arthur cringes. “Of course. Sorry—silly of me to—”

“I meant it,” John finishes, cutting off Arthur’s babbling. “All of it.”

“You... you did?”

“Yes.” Doubt creeps into his voice. “Is that—okay?”

“Oh.” Arthur sounds pleased. It soothes the knot inside John and makes him smile, inasmuch as he *can* smile. “Yes. That’s—well, that’s certainly something, I suppose.”

“I suppose it is.”

“You also said,” Arthur continues raggedly, like he’s straining to get the words out. “That you wished—you wished you could see my face when I—came.”

“Yes,” John says, and then, because it’s true but also because he wants to make Arthur squirm, “I wish I could taste you, too.”

“*John.*”

“Describe it for me, Arthur.”

“What?”

“Tell me how you taste.”

“Fuck, that’s—that’s filthy, John. I can’t.”

“I told you, I like you dirty. I want to watch you lick your spend off our fingers, Arthur.”

John expects the scandalized gasp that elicits, but not what comes next.

“*God*—okay,” Arthur whispers. He sounds shocked and almost giddy with it. “Give—give it to me.”

“Arthur?”

“Give me your hand, John.”

John obeys, raising his hand to Arthur’s lips like an offering. The first flick of his tongue is tentative, almost demure, just darting out to taste.

“Jesus, Arthur,” John gasps. “I can feel that. Your mouth is hot, like a furnace.”

Arthur moans and presses closer to John’s hand, lapping at his salty skin. John spreads his fingers and Arthur follows the slight motion with his tongue, licking between each finger and laving at the sensitive flesh until it’s clean. He presses a chaste kiss to John’s palm when he’s done, and something inside him trembles.

John’s hand captures Arthur’s jaw. His thumb drags across Arthur’s lips in a facsimile of a kiss, catching the moisture there. Arthur closes his lips around the pad of his thumb, sucking it against his teeth and sending a shower of sparks through every nerve John shares.

“Tell me,” he growls.

“It’s salty,” Arthur says, breath huffing across John’s damp skin. “Like sea water, but slightly bitter. There’s not really much else to it. The texture is slippery and a bit thick.”

“I wish—” John trails off, as though unsure if he should continue.

“Tell me,” Arthur echoes.

“It’s not decent.”

Arthur chuckles. “Yes, well. I think you may have cured me of decency, at least for the moment.”

They lapse back into silence, but John stays—close, Arthur supposes is how he’d describe it. He doesn’t stop touching Arthur—just soft, fond brushes of skin: fingers dusting his collarbone, tracing his earlobe, smoothing loose hair away from his face. Arthur sighs into it.

“Ask me again someday,” John says, after a while. “When we’ve separated. When I’m whole again.” He doesn’t say, *when it matters what I wish for*. He thinks Arthur hears it, anyway.

For a moment, the only sound is Arthur’s gentle breathing. “I will,” he replies, almost shyly. “If you mean that.”

“I mean it,” John murmurs. He tugs the blankets up over their belly. “Get some sleep, Arthur.”

“Yes, I suppose I should. Goodnight, John. And—well, thank you.”

John chuckles. “Any time, Arthur.”

End Notes

The title is from "[Bitter](#)" by Fletcher, which is very sexy and you should go listen to it.

I've tried to tag for everything, but please let me know if I missed something important.

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